

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company Achieves Iso 9001:2000 Certification

Client Profile:

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company turns alumina, made from bauxite, into molten aluminum metal that it then casts into ingots of various size, shape, and alloy that trades in the metals market. At full capacity, the plant runs five potlines and has about 500 workers who produce 185,000 short tons of ingots each year. Unfortunately, a recent alumina shortage and very high power prices dropped production from 60 percent of capacity to 20 percent, resulting in the layoff of almost half of the company's workers. The only other aluminum plant in the northwest is also operating at reduced capacity. Just three years ago, there were 10 plants in the region.

Situation:

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) realized that if it wanted to survive under increasingly difficult economic conditions, it needed to stay competitive. The exchange market has gradually come to adopt ISO standards as its own measure of quality, and manufacturers are more likely to have their products accepted with an ISO certification. CFAC was already certified to the 1994 ISO 9002 standard, but decided to update its certification with the help of the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

Solution:

MMEC's ISO 9000:2000 Internal Auditor Training Course helps companies with existing certifications learn and implement more recent standards. CFAC sent several employees to attend the course in 2002, and then arranged for several MMEC engineers to come to the plant to perform a gap assessment. This assessment helps companies identify the specific areas that do not comply with the new standard. MMEC also hosted its Internal Auditor Training course on-site at CFAC to engage more staff, and invited a neighboring company to take advantage of joint training to reduce costs.

MMEC's gap assessment found good levels of management involvement in the company quality program and also found strong corporate goals and metrics in place. MMEC helped CFAC build a review process into the existing quality system and streamline internal procedures. MMEC reviewed every functional area in the company and met periodically with its ISO team, assigning tasks and setting check-point reviews and deadlines to move the conversion forward. As CFAC employees completed sections of the new quality manual, they were sent to



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MMEC for independent review and feedback. MMEC reviewed the updated quality system prior to the official audit. CFAC received a flawless first audit and is now certified to the ISO 9001:2000 standard.

Results:

Achieved ISO 9001:2000 certification.

Demonstrated a continued committed to quality and continuous improvement.

Developed a customer feedback form to improve measurement of customer satisfaction.

Improved competitive position in the industry.

Testimonial:

"Working with the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center was a real cost savings and kept our Q[uality] Team from having to make flights out-of-state for consultations. It kept us moving forward."

Steve Knight, Plant Manager